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# Youth Transitions and Changing Labour Markets: Germany and England in the Late 1980s

*John Bynner*\*

**Abstract:** »Übergänge im Jugendalter und Veränderungen auf den Arbeitsmärkten: Deutschland und England in den späten 1980er Jahren«. The paper describes the origins and discusses the results of a study of youth transitions to work in England and Germany in the late 1980s, at a time of dramatic social, economic and political change. The novel design involving quantitative and qualitative data collection from young men and young women on the same 'career trajectories' in two comparable labour markets in England and two in Germany, generated insights into the way vocational training systems in the two countries were being experienced by young people and how the vocational training systems were adapting to change. The German system for managing the transition through apprenticeship with cultural roots going back the Middle Ages was directed at instilling a broad range of civic attributes of which occupational identity was the central part. In contrast the English system was focused exclusively on equipping young people with the skills that would enable them to gain and retain employment. During the transition process itself the identity of German trainees was closer to that of student compared with trainees in England where that of worker was dominant. At times of massive economic (and in Germany, political) upheaval, both countries learned from each other in attempting to adapt their systems to meet young people's needs with mixed results. The policy challenges raised by the findings are discussed.

**Keywords:** youth transitions, career trajectories, dual system, England Germany, comparative research, area study, occupation, citizenship.

## Background

Ever since the Hanoverian succession to the English monarchy at the end of the 18th Century, the relationship between Germany and England has been marked in equal measure by mutual admiration and a degree of envy. Though Britain had a lead in establishing the industrial revolution, from then on there was a growing admiration for the superiority of German technical competence that persisted at the time of the project reported here – the late 1980s. At the same time, many Germans admired the British monarchy and Parliamentary system of Government of checks and balances rather than rigid regulation, maintaining

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a degree of political stability and civil cohesion that appeared more difficult to achieve closer to home (Rose and Wignanek, 1990).

An important feature of these differences is the way each country prepares the next generation for adulthood – especially via entry to the labour market and adult skilled occupations – with origins going back to the middle ages. Industrialization in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries merely heightened standardization of the means by which the older generation of skilled workers transmitted their knowledge and understanding to the next generation who would replace them.

The German dual system of apprenticeship, combining work-based training by an employer, with off-site education in a state run vocational school, the *berufsschule*, under the terms of a training contract compares with the much more *laissez-fair* arrangements in England comprising vocational schooling in a further education college, employment with varying levels of training from poor to excellent, government sponsored training and the elite route through apprenticeship into the skilled trades. The English apprenticeship recruited at its peak 120,000 young school leavers each year of which only 20,000 were girls and took up to five years to complete. This compares with the 600,000 school leaver entry each year into the German three-year apprenticeship of which around 40% are girls. Most of the German girls not entering an apprenticeship still experience vocational training but typically full-time in a vocational school, for example training to become a nursery nurse (Wallace, 1995). Another key feature is the tripartite education system split between *gymnasium* (higher education and the professions) and the *realschule* (intermediate) and *hauptschule* (skilled manual) routes to apprenticeship, with a steady decline in popularity of the latter down from two thirds of the age cohort in the 1960s to one fifth in the 1980s (Evans and Heinz, 1994). The overriding principle applying to the transitions of all school leavers is maintenance of contact with the education system up to age 18. Governance of the system locally is the responsibility of the social partners – employers, trade unions and politicians. The education component is managed by the local Lande school authorities of the local and the training curriculum and standards by the Federal State and Local Chambers of Commerce.

The dual system is shared by all German speaking countries in Europe. Most of other countries focus more on the education system as the means for young people to enter, or in French terms gain '*insertion*' into, the labour market. This involves offering vocational routes in the latter part of secondary schooling, with increasing amounts of work experience supplied by local employers as part of the curriculum. In this sense the British system has been described by OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) as a 'hybrid', combining a mixture of VET methods rather than a single unified system. What is particularly distinctive about it is that the transition from school to work was not seen, until relatively recently, as demanding a period of voca-

tional training for all school leavers in preparation for adult work. Up to the mid 1970s two thirds of the age cohort left education at the minimum age of 16, a large proportion of whom entered unskilled manual work, requiring no qualifications (Green and Steedman, 1993).

The different transition systems come closest together, of course, on the academic or, as more commonly described, 'general routes' to the higher professions, such as Law and Medicine, via higher education, but even here the common practice in European countries is a much more extended period for a first degree of 4 or 5 years, compared with the English 3 years. The English approach is one of accelerated transition, even at the highest levels, but particularly for the early school leavers, moving directly from school into jobs, most requiring little or no certification.

All transition systems share the common goal of equipping young people with continuing and rewarding employment. Such progression will meet not only their financial and occupational needs, but contribute to the wellbeing of the economy nationally. But here a paradox begins to emerge. Evidence suggests that despite the strong advocacy of the superiority of one route – the German dual system – over others (e.g. Blossfeld, 1992; Deissinger, 1997; Hamilton and Hamilton, 1999), differences in financial returns to the different systems and in rewarding employment in labour markets that broadly resemble each other are remarkably small (Brauns, Müller and Steinmann, 1997). What determines the success of an economy is much more to do with the policy instruments available to capitalise on skills, whatever their source, i.e. human capital (Becker, 1975) is much the same however you build it. If significant economic benefits are not to be gained from one vocational preparation system, rather than another, then what are they primarily for?

This leads to the less explicit benefits of VET systems – the cultural role they play in the development of other attributes of identity, beside those to do with occupation, such as civic identity and citizenship. The *Berufsschule* component of the dual system ranges much more widely in its goals than simply imparting work-related skills in the occupational area for which the young person is being trained. Modern languages, even philosophy and physics, will occur in the curriculum. Even the occupational identity itself is not as clearly the focus nor necessarily the outcome of training as might be expected. Although the aim is to equip the young person with a specific occupation, at the time of the study only 40% of the young people on apprenticeships were likely to be taken on in the occupational area in which they had been trained and only half by the employer who had trained them. What all of them had achieved through apprenticeship was exposure to the idea of, and demands of, work. This meant that, regardless of opportunities in their chosen occupational career, trainees would be seen by German employers as fully employable. It is at this point that the more implicit goals of the system become apparent. The broader

set of competences that the system imparts play an important role in establishing the identity of citizen in the German state.

In contrast, the British system sees no links between preparation for employment and citizenship viewing the latter as the job of general education in schools, or in the family and community. The lack of a written constitution in Britain and an identified role for individuals in it, other than as 'subjects' of the monarch, reinforces the lack of any clear goals and structures, by which young people acquire civic identity. The sole purpose of any vocational education during the transition from school to work is to equip the young person with the skills needed for work. In so far as there is any broader socialisation involved it is towards ways of working, and building up the components of employability, punctuality, accepting authority, team work and training others. The focus is on enhancing productivity in the workplace, not the creation of the adult citizen.

### Socio-economic transformation

From the 1970s to the 1980s, the fairly stable patterns involved in the German and British transition arrangements – as in other systems – came under stress. Technological transformation of industry changed the nature of employment rendering many past skills and the training that had gone into them redundant. Coupled with a worldwide recession, the consequence was a contracting youth labour market and rising unemployment, especially among young people, in which only the 20% on the routes to the professions via higher education were relatively protected. Problems were intensified in the old industrial areas based on heavy industry such as ship building and coal mining as businesses employing traditional production methods lost out to new ones in the Far East (Ashton and Green, 1996)

By the mid 1980s these global pressures were coming to a head, affecting the prospects of young people entering the labour market across all European countries, (Jallade, 1989; Miller and Blossfeld, 2003). By the end of the 1980s another major transformation occurred, the collapse of the Soviet Union and German reunification. The economic consequences of this change were the traumas of major structural adjustments, especially for the countries of the ex-Soviet Union, transforming their own command economies, run in accordance with Communist principles, to demand-led capitalist free markets. Thus continuities in socialisation processes that had differed between East and West Germany in form and function since the Second World War – despite their foundations in a common culture and institutions prior to the split – were broken (Bynner and Silbereisen, 2000; Evans, Behrens and Kaluza, 2000).

A significant consequence of the major disruptions in past patterns was a reduction in employment opportunities at least temporarily. The old patterns of entry from vocational education schemes into adult employment were no longer sustainable, creating 'lost generations' with problems not only in getting

jobs but in losing the critical transition experience that would underpin future employability. In Germany the effects were mainly seen in apprenticeship where training places dried up or the job opportunities following them ceased to exist (Evans, 1990). In England the consequence was contracting labour markets where young people expecting to work directly after leaving school no longer found this opportunity available to them. They encountered what was described by Ashton and Maguire (1986) as a 'vanishing youth labour market' from which the least qualified young people suffered particularly.

The response in the two countries was however different. In Germany increasing numbers of *gymnasium* graduates with the *abitur* certificate postponed entry to university to improve later job chances by doing an apprenticeship first as a kind of 'vocational insurance' (Bynner, 1991). This choice, coupled with nine months compulsory military training for males, pushed the average age of university graduation up to 29 for men and 28 for women (BMBW, 1994). The effect was also to squeeze the traditional route via the *hauptsschule* and the *realschule* to apprenticeship the average age of entry for which by the 1980s had reached 19. In England increasing numbers of young people started to stay on in education beyond the minimum age – rising to 50% by 1986 (now close to 70%).

The wider response in both countries was to reform their Vocational Education and Training Systems (VET) systems. In England the *New Training Initiative*, announced in 1991, introduced for the first time a universal Youth Training Scheme (YTS) initially lasting one year and subsequently two years. This would not only improve the job prospects for school leavers, but would absorb all other forms of youth training such as the traditional 5 year apprenticeship. Notably apprenticeship was seen as by the Government as largely 'time serving' and an inefficient way of imparting to young people the skills that the contemporary economy needed. To accompany YTS a new national modular vocational qualification (NVQs) taken at number of levels was introduced to parallel the longstanding General Certificate of Education offered at 'Ordinary' (age 16) and 'Advanced' (age 18) standards. In Germany the response was to broaden the training curriculum reducing the number of recognised occupations from three thousand to 350 and to introduce Government sponsored training as a route to apprenticeship. In these endeavours both countries borrowed from each other. YTS was in certain respects a watered down and shortened version of German apprenticeship lacking too the governance locally of the social partners. The multitude of schemes in Germany introduced as an alternative to apprenticeship such as *Arbeiten und Lernen* took as an exemplar of how to deal with disengaged young people the English YTS.

## Research

Much research has been carried on the similarities and differences between the German and English transition systems within European Frameworks such as CEDEFOP or in detailed analyses of the two systems comparing their strengths and weakness (e.g. Rose and Page, 1989; Prais and Wagner, 1985; Green and Steedman, 1993; Ashton and Green, 1996). What has typically been missing from these accounts is observation and analysis of how the transition systems are experienced by young people on the different trajectories leading to adult work. What are the origins and outcomes of failing to gain an apprentice place in a depressed labour market in Germany or failing to get a job after leaving school in Britain? And how does this compare with the experience of proceeding along the academic route to the professions? What are the outcomes in the labour market? And do such outcomes vary depending on local economic factors? How are they differentiated by age, cohort, gender and social class? And what are the accompanying values, which underpin success or failure?

The present study was conducted to improve understanding of how each country's transition system was adapting to social and economic change. The policy goal was to enable young people to acquire the capability needed for adult work in the changing conditions of the late 1980s – just prior to German reunification in 1990.

The opportunity to put together such a project was fortuitous. In 1985 the author took up the role of Director of the UK Economic and Social Research Council's *ESRC 16-19 Initiative*, a research programme on economic and political socialisation (Banks et al., 1992). This included a longitudinal study involving follow up of cohorts of 800 young people aged 15-16 and 17-18 (i.e. 1600 in total) in each of four economically contrasting labour markets: Swindon (expanding), Liverpool (contracting), Sheffield (recovering), Kirkcaldy, Scotland (mixed). At the time when the 16-19 Initiative programme was being established it was possible to commission a colleague who was attending the 1985 American Educational Research Association conference in San Francisco to report on new research on the vocational education and training response to economic change. Of all the sessions attended, those devoted to youth transition research in West Germany proved exceptionally valuable to the development of our own research plan. Three German academics spoke about the research they were undertaking as part of major DFG research programmes in Western Germany: *Status Passages in the Life Course*, Walter Heinz (Bremen); *Prevention and Intervention in Adolescence* Klaus Hurrelmann (Bielefeld); the *Berlin Youth Longitudinal Study*, Rainer Silbereisen (Berlin). Accordingly, it was decided to make contact with the project leaders with a view to exploring comparative research possibilities.

The result was a follow-up visit to two of the German teams, Heinz and Hurrelmann (Silbereisen was not available at the time) and an agreement from them to collaborate with two of the teams in the 16-19 initiative, Karen Evans

(University of Surrey) and Ken Roberts (University of Liverpool). The focus of the comparative project would be to investigate young people's experience of the transition to work in the two countries within a tightly controlled matched sample design. The author served as coordinator of the programme. Another important feature was that each of the four teams' research officers for which funding was needed would be bilingual. An approach to the Anglo German Foundation for the study of Industrial Society (AGF) resulted in support for what was ultimately a three year research project, subsequently extended to four, through support from the European Commission. The work extended beyond the period of the original project and follow-up, from which two books (Bynner and Roberts, 1991; Evans and Heinz, 1994) and numerous papers were produced. Subsequently there was a further Anglo-German funded study led by Karen Evans using different towns and this time extending to East Germany – Leipzig and Hanover (Germany) and Derby (England). The focus this time was more on the experience of unemployed young adults in the different towns.

Such cross national comparison has great value in enabling each society to examine its strengths and weaknesses against that of others, while also recognising the essential foundations and continuities in terms of which different national identities are constructed (Bynner and Chisholm, 1988).

Whatever routes young English people take to the labour market involve a much more abrupt transition at least in identity terms, between the childhood status of being at school and the adult status of being at work than in Germany. Student status is reserved for those in further and higher post-school education. In Germany there is a prolonged period of preparation in between, with apprenticeship more akin to the status and identity of student in young people's eyes to that of worker. Another aspect of the extended transition is that vocational preparation is focussed on a much broader range of qualities that are being established to equip the young person for adult citizenship, as institutionalised through the VET system. In England, adult citizenship is simply endowed by the state at a given age rather than built through the processes of education.

The research aim pursued in this paper is to test empirically, through the experience of young people, the hypothesis that the German VET system, though ostensibly concerned with equipping young people with the skills needed for work, has much wider intentions and consequences for the development of identity, offering in a sense, a form of student experience rather than merely that of trainee for work as in the 'Mixed' English system.

## Methodology

Comparative research can take a number of forms, going from the highest level of examining national statistics across countries in terms of economic and social performance, right down to ethnographic studies of particular groups or localities in the different countries. The key design feature of the Anglo-



German project as the context of youth transitions was *place*, i.e. locating the study in localities that contrasted within each country as well as having comparability across countries. The labour market, in which 80% of the people who live in the area also work in it, was the driving principle of the design. (Full details are given in Bynner and Heinz, 1991).

As noted earlier, the 16-19 initiative comprised four area studies in contrasting labour markets – Swindon, Liverpool, Sheffield and Kircaldy. It was decided to match an expanding and contracting labour market in England – Swindon (expanding) and Liverpool (contracting) – with comparable labour markets in Germany, Paderborn (expanding) and Bremen (contracting). Separate teams were responsible for each area and handled data collection in them – Paderborn (University of Bielefeld); Bremen (University of Bremen); Liverpool (Liverpool University); Swindon (University of Surrey). The German samples were recruited through initial screening questionnaires to select individual young people matching the categories of the design.

A further basis of comparison involved age and gender. Age comprised the two groups in the ESRC *16-19 Initiative*, at the ages they had reached in 1986-87: 16/17, 18/19 with equal numbers of German boys and girls matched to their English counterparts in each age group.

The final basis for stratification was much more complex but central to the aims of the study and involved the idea of ‘career trajectory’ – a central theme of the *16-19 Initiative*. Four major types of route to adult occupations were identified on which young people could be located:

- 1) Academic mainstream leading towards higher education and professional occupations
- 2) Training and education leading to skilled employment: dual system in Germany; high quality work-based training and apprenticeship or further education leading to vocational qualifications in England.
- 3) Other forms of education and training leading typically to semi-skilled employment, including drop-out from an established training programme or apprenticeship
- 4) Early Labour market experience of unskilled jobs, unemployment and short-term ‘remedial’ training schemes

The problem with comparing these categories across countries was that although there was strong evidence of all four groups in the English towns, with a fairly even distribution of the cohorts across them, in Germany the last two categories – accounting for only some 15% of the age group – were more difficult to identify. This is because of the German regulations that compel young people to stay in touch with the education system up to the age of 18. It also reflects the national commitment, reflected in the actions of the social partners (local politicians, employers and trade unions), to ensuring that all young people gain through vocational training some kind of occupation. However, drop-outs from apprenticeship or failure to get one are more prevalent than is often

realised and especially during a period of massive economic strain, it was possible to identify young people in Germany who did roughly match all four career trajectories.

The next design stage, however, took the idea of career trajectory much further by matching at the individual level the kind of occupation that young people were likely to enter. Thus an electrician in Swindon could be matched with an electrician in Paderborn and a hairdresser in Liverpool with a hairdresser in Bremen. In accordance with the principle of experimental design, this 'close matching' enabled the experience and attitudes of young people pursuing similar occupation careers, to be examined in the different settings of vocational preparation in the two countries with a view to isolating any 'systemic effects'.

It is notable however that the decisions reached in relation to this design were not easy to make. They involved a series of meetings alternating between Germany and England, each lasting 2 to 3 days, a large part of which was devoted to the meaning of key concepts as understood in the two societies. It became clear, for example, that training itself carried different connotations in Germany than it had in England. In Germany training was seen as providing a foundation for skills at a certified standard, which could be realised fully and applied in any workplace where the recognised occupation was practised. In the England 'training' was a much looser concept, with often no obvious employment outcome other than enhanced prospects of getting a job though this often failed to materialise in depressed labour markets, not least because of a kind of stigma reflecting the perceived poor quality of YTS. Vocational training as such, was also seen as a poor substitute for employment because much of it in the 1980s was not linked directly into particular jobs compared with the apprenticeships it had replaced. It also offered only half the average youth wage in the form of a training allowance, which made it particularly unappealing to most young people and their parents.

Such insights were fundamental to operationalising the key concepts with which the study was concerned and interpreting their relationships. Reaching agreement about them therefore turned out to be one of the most productive aspects of the work.

The focus of the study was directed principally at vocational preparation and its outcomes in the two societies. This paper extends, however, to the less tangible aspects of the experience as evident in relation to the development of identity more broadly. Identity here refers to the whole range of attitudes and behaviours, through which the self-concept is constructed. It therefore comprises objective and subjective features of the developing individual including self perceptions, attitudes and behaviours that the individual perceives themselves and is perceived by others to have (Côté and Levine, 2002; Banks et al., 1992). Apart from work experience and behaviour in the work place the Anglo-German project took over from the 16-19 initiative, a range of variables tapping attitudes and behaviours through which a picture of young people's iden-

tity could be constructed. These comprised for present purposes five such facets of identity: perceived work-related skill, occupational self confidence, age wants to leave home, age wants to marry, interest in politics.

The young people completed questionnaires adapted from those used in the *16-19 Initiative* about their vocational preparation and work experiences and also answered a number of other questions about their behaviour and attitudes (Bynner and Roberts, 1991 supplies full details). Sample members were also selected for interview from each of the four trajectories in each town in each country. In the second stage of the study, started two years later, data collection comprised entirely qualitative enquiry based on these 'cases'. Sixty young people were interviewed using the social biographical method of enquiry (Heinz, 2003). The first stage quantitative enquiry is pursued mainly here.

The comparative research design enables experience of young people in the two countries to be compared, taking account of the four factors to which the matching across countries was undertaken. The fifth factor was of course 'nation state' (country), to which our primary interest was directed, i.e. we could investigate the extent to which national differences are sustained when labour market and other factors are taken into account for young people on the different trajectories to adult life.

In addition the sample design includes a measure of social change as embodied in the distinction between expanding and contracting labour markets: Swindon/Paderborn (expanding) versus Bremen/Liverpool (contracting). This factor can be set against other matching factors in the two samples cohort (16-17 and 18-19), gender (males and females) and career route or 'trajectory' as previously defined, embodying education and type of occupational destination.

The questionnaire data were used to assess a number of transition experiences and outcomes using the same indicators in the two countries. The indicators used included attitude scales derived from factor analysis of sets of opinion items: "perceived work-related skills", "occupational (self) confidence", "age expecting to leave home", "age expecting to marry" and "interest in politics". Interest in politics was chosen as signifying the beginning of political participation, the hallmark of adult citizenship. Other attitude variables were derived from single opinion items. Table 1 provides details of the measurement of all the variables used.

Table 1 Variables used in the Anglo German analysis

<b>Identity variables</b>	
Perceived Work-related Experience	score obtained by aggregating scores for 10 work-related skills and experiences, each scored on a four-point scale – never (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3), quite often (4), very often (5). Items comprised: ‘discussed in a group the best way to perform a task’, ‘worked as a member of a team’, ‘been asked for advice from others on how to tackle a problem’, ‘felt a sense of achievement’, ‘had a chance to use your initiative’, ‘felt all your abilities were being used’, ‘been able to make decisions for yourself’, ‘been given responsibility’, ‘felt stretched/ challenged’, ‘developed new skills and abilities’, ‘set your own goals/targets’, ‘had your skills tested’
Occupation Self-Confidence	score obtained by aggregating scores on five occupational confidence indicators, each scored on a scale – extremely doubtful (1), very doubtful (2), fairly doubtful (3), reasonably confident (4), very confident (5). Items comprised: ‘In ten years time I will have the kind of job that I really want’, ‘I will be able to impress an employer in a job interview’, ‘I will be able to get on with the people I work with’, ‘I will avoid unemployment’, ‘I will not be dismissed from a job for unsatisfactory work’.
Age expecting to leave home	age in years
Age expecting to marry	age in years
Interest in politic	measured on a four-point scale, in response to the question: “How interested are you in politics?” – very interested (4), quite interested (3), not very interested (2), not at all interested (1).
<b>Factors affecting transition outcome</b>	
Country	Germany (1), England (2)
Cohort:	Younger, 16-17 (1); Older, 18-19 (2)
Sex	Female (1), Male (2)
Career Route / Trajectory	Academic/Professional (1), Skilled Occupations (2), Semi/ partly-skilled Occupations (3), Unskilled (4).
Labour Market	Expanding (1), Contracting (2).

Note: Numbers in brackets denote the score for each category of each variable

## Findings

The balanced design with matching across countries, lent itself to an analysis of variance from which a selection of results are reported next, starting with descriptive data.

### Descriptive data

Table 2 shows the mean scores for each of the transition indicators, for each category of the four factors for Germany and England separately.

Table 2: Transition identity outcome variables (mean scores) by cohort, labour market, sex, career trajectory and by country

	Germany						England					
Factor	Work ex- perience	Employment confidence	Age leave home	Age marry	Interest in politics	Work ex- perience	Employment confidence	Age leave home	Age marry	Interest in politics		
Cohort												
Older	3.1	4.1	21.2	26.8	2.7	3.8	4.9	21.9	24.8	2.5		
Younger	3.1	4.2	19.6	25.0	2.5	3.6	4.9	20.5	24.9	2.3		
Gender												
Male	3.1	4.2	21.1	26.8	2.8	3.6	4.9	20.9	25.3	2.5		
Female	3.1	4.1	20.5	25.0	2.5	3.8	4.9	20.5	24.4	2.2		
Career trajectory												
Prof.	3.3	4.4	20.7	27.4	3.2	3.9	4.9	20.0	25.9	3.0		
Skilled	3.3	4.3	21.6	25.4	2.6	3.8	4.9	21.1	24.9	2.3		
Semi-skilled	3.0	4.1	20.6	26.1	2.6	3.8	4.9	21.5	24.3	2.1		
Uncertain	2.8	4.0	20.3	24.4	2.1	3.3	4.8	20.3	24.0	2.1		
Labour Market												
Expanding	3.2	4.6	21.4	25.8	2.8	3.7	4.9	20.5	24.3	2.3		
Contracting	3.0	3.7	20.4	26.0	2.5	3.7	4.9	20.9	25.3	2.5		

The notable feature of the bi-variate comparisons in Table 2 e was the much higher levels of work experience and occupational self-confidence claimed by the English young people compared with the German young people, and a higher desired age of marriage in Germany compared with England – though not higher age of leaving home. All the differences were in line with the more prolonged transition to adulthood in Germany than in England. In addition, in Germany, there were higher levels of interest in politics than in England, suggesting a more developed sense of adult citizenship there despite the longer time it took to reach some aspects of it, e.g. full financial autonomy.

The mean values also varied between cohorts, males and females, career trajectories and labour markets. Perceived work-related skills were, as we might expect, higher in the older groups and, perhaps more surprisingly, higher in the professional and skilled categories than the semi-skilled and uncertain categories. Males and females barely differed. Surprisingly, there was also relatively little difference between the expanding and the contracting labour markets, except more evidence of perceived work-related skills in the former than in the latter and much higher occupational self confidence, especially in the German expanding labour market of Paderborn. Age of leaving home and age of marriage related most strongly to cohort and gender (males opting for higher ages). Higher ages for leaving home and getting married were a preferred more often in the professional groups than in the unskilled groups in both countries. Interest in politics was very strongly connected with career trajectory, with the professional groups showing by far the most interest, especially in England.

### Analysis of variance

To determine which of the factors best predicted the transition outcome indicators, taking account of the other factors, and to assess their interactions, analysis of variance of the transition indicators was carried out (Table 3). Apart from the main effects, two way and higher level interactions between the factors were also estimated. Table 3 below shows the main and 2-way interaction effects of the five factors. (See Bynner, 2000, for a full account including all the statistical estimates).

Table 3 Analysis of variance of transition identity outcome variables by country, cohort, sex, labour market and trajectory: sums of squares and P values: for main effects and two-way interactions

	Work experience			Occupational confidence			Age wants to leave home			Age wants to marry			Interest in politics		
	ss	df	P	ss	df	P	ss	df	P	ss	df	P	ss	df	P
Main effects	82.28	7		117.86	7		167.17	7		634.89	7	***	103.49	7	
Country	55.22	1	***	83.63	1	***	0.03	1	NS	101.94	1	**	11.89	1	***
Cohort	1.43	1	NS	0.07	1	NS	55.98	1	***	63.35	1	*	5.13	1	**
Sex	0.13	1	NS	1.41	1	**	5.93	1	NS	116.05	1	***	9.81	1	***
Career trajectory	22.48	3	***	4.87	3	***	46.62	3	**	282.77	3	***	76.63	3	***
Labour Market	3.62	1	**	28.30	1	***	8.83	1	NS	58.95	1	*	0.17	1	NS
Two-way interactions	11.97	18	NS	32.06	18	NS	113.6	18	*	312.26	18	*	17.39	18	*
a x b	0.34	1	NS	0.32	1	NS	16.64	1	*	58.41	1	*	0.28	1	NS
a x c	0.54	1	NS	0.68	1	*	2.97	1	NS	39.12	1	*	0.60	1	NS
a x d	2.91	3	NS	1.65	3	*	6.00	3	NS	19.36	3	NS	4.30	3	NS
a x e	1.16	1	NS	30.92	1	***	28.42	1	**	40.85	1	*	7.50	1	NS
b x c	0.54	1	NS	0.11	1	NS	4.81	1	NS	0.10	1	NS	0.67	1	NS
b x d	1.03	3	NS	1.07	3	NS	8.83	3	NS	22.53	3	NS	1.15	3	NS
b x e	0.29	1	NS	0.19	1	NS	0.03	1	NS	12.65	1	NS	0.02	1	NS
c x d	1.75	3	NS	1.36	3	*	22.91	3	NS	38.47	3	NS	0.92	3	NS
c x e	1.61	1	NS	0.29	1	NS	0.14	1	NS	10.51	1	NS	0.17	1	NS
d x e	1.95	3	NS	0.79	3	NS	16.12	3	NS	60.25	3	NS	2.97	3	NS

\* = P<.05; \*\* = P<.01; \*\*\* = P<.001; NS = Not statistically significant; Note: ss = sum of squares; df = degrees of freedom; p = probability

The main finding was the strong effect of country on all indicators, with the exception of age wants to leave home and age wants to marry. Thus perceived work-related skills, occupational self-confidence and interest in politics were all strongly differentiated between Germany and England. Of the other factors, as we might expect, cohort was implicated in age wants to leave home and age wants to marry – also notably interest in politics. Gender similarly related to these variables. The strongest relationship, however, across all five indicators was career trajectory. Not only were significant effects identified especially for interest in politics, but their size suggested that career trajectory was the key discriminator in terms of perceived work-related skills. The labour market, whether contracting or expanding, was only modestly related to these outcome variables, but nevertheless showed significant effects, with both work experience and especially occupational self-confidence higher in the expanding labour markets.

Interactions were identified that were modest by comparison with the main effects and were mainly restricted to country and the other factors, especially labour market in relation to occupational self-confidence, interest in politics and to a lesser extent to desired age of leaving home and age expecting to marry.

### Biographical data

From the qualitative data generated by the questionnaire and subsequent interviews it was possible to elucidate the figures further. The analysis of variance pointed to particular patterns of experience differing between the countries which could be mapped out in more detail through the analysis of individual case records. Following Ragin (1987), an extensive ‘dialogue’ was entered into between the measured variables and the individual cases to elucidate the biographical processes that lay behind the quantitative differences. Thus the apparently greater occupational self-confidence of English young people, compared with their German counterparts, could be more effectively understood through the biographical experience of the young people involved, as just one case study demonstrates.

In Paderborn, a carpenter on a building site, having completed a training scheme, was at the time of the study working to finish an apprenticeship and gain a certified qualification. In contrast, the matched Swindon respondent had been employed following YTS as a carpenter by a building contractor. He worked in the carpentry shop but did not attend college nor had he any vocational qualifications. Instead his learning was entirely on the job with his tasks and responsibilities gradually being extended.

This flexibility of the English approach compared with that of Germany, gave opportunities for young people to use their initiative to develop their careers relatively quickly. Whether they were able to demonstrate the same



level of skills acquisition of their German counterparts in exercising these responsibilities was a different matter. That would depend on the quality of the unregulated training their employer had been able to offer them. Such occupational progression and mobility was of course also dependent on the buoyancy of the local labour market and was less easily achieved in Liverpool than in Swindon. Again a combination of factors mediated the effects of attributes acquired through VET on employment outcomes.

## Conclusions

In accordance with the main hypothesis with which this paper began, the findings point to the importance of the national context made up of each country's institutions and policies in shaping transition patterns. They also demonstrate the complex interactions between structural factors, cultural factors, individual attributes – as embodied in personal agency – and social change on identity outcomes. Such 'filtering mechanisms', as Silbereisen and Tomasik (this volume) describe them, and the social interactions that follow, are critically important in determining both the course of and outcomes of transition experiences for young men and young women at particular times and in particular places. Thus the VET system, for example, if working effectively supplies the means of transmitting to young people the personal resources that will enable them to take advantage of opportunities and to mitigate the obstacles against developmental progress that the local economy may erect. The young people in declining labour markets in the study lacking work experience tended to have lower levels of perceived work-related skills and lower levels of occupational self-confidence. But these features of their lives interacted with other factors of which the national system and the career trajectories it supports were the most important.

The main conclusion to be drawn therefore is that the labour market is a significant factor in shaping youth transitions but its effects need to be set against those of other factors, of which the VET system and career trajectory are particularly prominent. At the same time, age, gender and labour market are also critically important in mediating the effects of economic change and consequently how effective young people's transitions to adulthood at any given period and in any given place are likely to be. In addition, as Silbereisen and Tomasik in their model of the developmental process make clear (this volume, Table 1) such effects needed to be viewed against the more long term 'distal, globalising economic trends taking place in each country. The most significant in both countries at the time of the Anglo German Study was the recession that dominated the 1980s compounded in the case of Germany from 1990 by the economic shocks associated with reunification. We were not able to include East German young people in the study, but as noted earlier, this was subsequently done in a further AGF-funded project work using two German towns,

Leipzig and Hanover, and one English town, Derby (Behrens and Evans, 2002; Evans, 2002; Evans, Behrens and Kaluza, 2000).

Our conclusions resonate with those from this later research and from other research carried out subsequently on the effects of German reunification through the 1990s (Silbereisen, 1993, 1994; Weymann, 1999; Reitzle and Silbereisen, 2000; Tromsdorff, 2000; Diewald, 2000). The apprenticeship-based arrangements of entry to employment linked to local factories that prevailed in East Germany were broken. There was a lack of apprenticeship places, and therefore ensuing employability problems, in the much reduced labour market that existed then. The situation was in certain ways comparable to parts of England, after the collapse of heavy industry in the 1970s and 1980s where unlike in West Germany there was little enduring infrastructure and planned redeployment to deal with it. Hence the development of training schemes in East Germany in place of apprenticeships tended to become the norm. The negative effects of these changes were felt more strongly by those on the skilled – and semi-skilled and unskilled – routes than for those leaving higher education, with a continuing gap in employment prospects evident between them (e.g. Weymann, 1999) that is still evident today. The attempt to unify the transformation of the education system into a replica of the tri-part West German one also had its own negative effects, which again differentially affected more those on the lower education tracks.

These studies also showed how resilience to disrupted transition, as embodied in such personal attributes as self-confidence, and ‘control beliefs’, were also critical in restoring career prospects. Lack of them, especially, especially in Germany, could damage sometimes permanently the progress to employment and full citizenship that the system had been designed to sustain especially (Bynner and Silbereisen, 2000; Schoon and Bynner, 2003; Evans and Heinz, 2004; Schoon and Silbereisen, 2009b).

### Anglo German Differences

The study provided important pointers to the significance of longstanding cultural assumptions and differences in analysing German and English experience. The late 1980s was a period of much social and political change. Economies were also being transformed at an increasing rate (Bynner, 1991). Accordingly, the overall picture we get from the study is a snapshot of effects as part of long term processes as they were actually occurring.

Casualties are likely in an ever more demanding employment system in which those who fail to acquire the necessary skills and competencies of interest to employers face difficulties both in gaining work and holding on to it (Bynner, 1994, 1996). Ulrich Beck’s term, ‘Risk Society’ (Beck, 1992) aptly sums up the increasing uncertainty of modern transition patterns, and the need for protection against the risks of social and occupational exclusion. Thus, past

certainities associated with the direction the occupational career was likely to take, rooted in social structural factors such as class, gender, ethnicity and location, give way to more 'individualised' patterns whereby young people have to 'navigate their way' to secure and continuing employment (1997). Success is still likely to depend strongly on the human and cultural 'capital' they have acquired as certified by qualifications and the family and social context in which this is achieved (Bynner, 2001; Schoon and Bynner, 2003; Schoon and Silbereisen, 2009a).

Young people are increasingly likely to change not only their employers, but even their occupations through their lives, as the skills associated with one field of work or occupation become redundant and are replaced by others (Jallade, 1989). In the 1980s there was becoming more frequently a 'revolving door' scenario, where labour market 'test runs', and cyclical trajectories between education, training and employment, replaced the old transition route of education-(training)-employment (Gershuny and Pahl, 1994). In such a process the first move from the classroom to the workplace – if it can be identified at all – loses its significance as an influence on future life patterns. The other overriding feature is the complexity of choices made in rapidly changing social and economic contexts. What becomes significant in ensuring a successful transition therefore for young people is the range of personal and family resources they are able to draw on over an extended period time to buffer them against economic adversity rather than work-related skills alone.

The penalty of training schemes in place of apprenticeships in Germany resided fundamentally in a value system that denied employability for those without the certified skills that must precede entry to a job. The status of the trainee/student was assumed by all German young people at least up to the age of 18 and the belief that acquiring skills can only be fully achieved at work makes their full acquisition a fairly distant prospect. Apprenticeship was the overriding goal. Boys on the skilled occupations routes had applied on average 13 times and girls 21 times to get one. In contrast, in England, with still a relatively large youth labour market – coupled with the absence of any real concept of trainee as apart from employee – a strong worker identity was established for school leavers. It is not surprising therefore that the training schemes (YTS) that the Government introduced in the early 1980s to combat youth unemployment and raise the levels of skill in Britain, were strongly resisted: in the larger survey from which the English sample were drawn, over half of respondents expressed the view that these schemes were just "slave labour" (Bynner, 1991).

### Policy challenge

The conclusions drawn about similarities and differences and strengths and weaknesses between the two societies led to 'policy borrowing' by both countries. In Germany a major policy concern was with helping young people, who

had failed to gain apprenticeships, by adopting short term training schemes of the YTS kind. The major difference with England, however, was that such training was not seen as a route to employment in its own right, but to apprenticeship through which employability skills and work values could be properly certificated.

In England the issue was whether training was supporting the young person's entry to employment. England's apprenticeship provision was originally restricted largely to a male elite entering a skilled workforce and probably did provide comparable experience to German apprenticeship, taking on average two years longer to complete and based in a much narrower range of occupations. It was replaced by initially a one year, then two year, universal training scheme – YTS – considered more appropriate for matching contemporary employment needs. What was never fully appreciated was the critical connection between the German apprenticeship and the requirements of adult status and identity in the wider society. Youth training was seen primarily, if not exclusively, as about equipping young people for jobs and there was no broader curriculum to support other outcomes. The consequence was a narrow functionalism, which could often fail, not only to support the young person into work of a lasting and fulfilling kind, but fail to contribute through this critical period of life to any broader requirements of active citizenship in a democracy.

Ironically, it was not until that policy went 'full circle' and YTS was replaced by the employment-based *New Modern Apprenticeship*, with 'Foundation' and 'Advanced' forms, that some semblance of the German apprenticeship began to take shape. Up to one third of the age cohort are engaged in such apprenticeships currently. The difference remains, however, that German aspirations are much more deeply rooted in a 'training culture', that accepts an extended period of vocational preparation as an essential preliminary to employment. At the same time the general education elements of apprenticeship in Germany and even of some of the best of the work-related training in England are more closely associated with the qualities usually attached to extended education. Heightened motivation to learn, self esteem, life satisfaction and interest in politics, characterise the more educated (Bynner, 1992) with a strong downward gradient in these attributes from higher to lower qualification levels in both countries. The fact that all these qualities were more common in the German sample, suggested that the mixture of education and training in Germany's "dual system", was contributing to the formation of such values more effectively than in England. In contemporary society, there is, accordingly, much to be said for building the different forms of capital, human, social and identity, over an extended period of time in accordance with the 'student model' as revealed by the study that fundamentally underlies the German approach to vocational training.

## Appraisal

Finally we need to reflect on the strengths of our comparative research design strategy from which our conclusions were derived. The representativeness of the sample was limited by the need to match individuals as closely as possible in terms of likely career and occupational outcomes. Hence it is quite possible that the selected towns failed to reflect either other towns like them or the country as a whole. However, the consistency of differences revealed between and within countries across educational levels and across labour markets suggests that the observed effects would have been likely to stand up to replication, with other more representative and rigorous survey designs. This belief is strengthened by their close harmonization with other comparative work in this area, especially on differences between the education and training systems and the values underpinning them in the two countries, (e.g. Rose and Wignanec, 1990). Moreover the insights gained from the qualitative interviews, conducted by bilingual researcher officers, strengthens the conviction that genuine differences in the interactions between VET systems and the experience of individual young people underlay the quantitative differences (Bynner and Heinz, 1991; Silbereisen and Tomasik, this volume).

By adopting strategies of the kind described, we greatly improved our ability to unravel differences and gain insights into their meaning for the young people involved. As writers such as Kohn (1989), Grootings (1983) and Ragin (1987) have noted, statistical comparisons alone can mislead the researcher into thinking that figures can be interpreted in the same way in different countries. Only by relating such data to individual and group experience in *context* can we begin to understand the forms of interaction between young people and the institutional filters through which they pass and how these differ between countries. The historical and cultural base of the institutions that operate these filters and the forms they take in different localities, supplies the foundation of such understanding. The attraction of the labour market defined as a journey to work area, is that it offers parameters for comparative study that can be applied anywhere and are more manageable in research terms than those of a national survey. There is much to be said for a comparative research strategy which operates at this local level collecting information about labour markets and the individuals in them mapped across countries and analysed by the method of paired comparison.

Moreover with the matching of individuals, problematic at the best of times, we gain additional advantages. Matched occupational pairs yield qualitative data of exceptional value in uncovering the processes lying behind statistical differences. Cases can be selected for interrogation to find out what the differences mean. By locating such an interrogation within a statistical design we greatly enhance the value of the qualitative data the cases are able to yield.

In short, the approach adopted, supplies a model for enhancing understanding of how different institutional arrangements for managing the transition to

adulthood are experienced in different societies. In the case of the study of youth transitions in England and Germany we learnt how two VET systems were adapting to change and through young people's experience of them, the policy challenges that needed to be met to match contemporary needs.

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